

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DJIBOU 01214 160819Z
ACTION HA-05

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P R 160730Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1168

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DEPT FOR ORM
AID FOR OFDA
USMISSION GENEVA PLEASE PASS TO MOHAMMAD BENAMAR-CHIEF,
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, UNHCR

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SREF, EP
SUBJ: FEEDING OF ETHIOPIAN URBAN REFUGEES

1. RATHER COINCIDENTALLY WE WERE INFORMED THAT UNHCR AND THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS HAD AGREED TO FEED 450 OF THE ESTIMATED 800 URBAN REFUGEES IN THE CITY OF DJIBOUTI. WE WERE TOLD BY ACTING UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE COUZZMAN THAT IT WAS THE INTENTION OF THE UNHCR TO USE PL480 COMMODITIES FOR THIS PROGRAM. APPARENTLY A BUDGET HAS BEEN APPROVED BY UNHCR GENEVA FOR THE PURCHASE OF ADDITIONAL COMMODITIES AND FOR THE LEASING OF A LOCAL RESTAURANT. WE WERE ALSO INFORMED THAT A QUOTE REFUGEE COMMITTEE END QUOTE HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED THAT WOULD SELECT 450 REFUGEES FROM THE POSSIBLE 800 (OR MORE) AND THAT THESE REFUGEES WOULD BE FED.

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2. WE ARE, OF COURSE, VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROGRAM. THIS CONCERN EXTENDS BEYOND THE USE OF USG COMMODITIES, TO THE POTENTIAL SERIOUS THREAT TO THE WHOLE REFUGEE PROGRAM IN DJIBOUTI. ALTHOUGH THE U.S. EMBASSY STRONGLY SUPPORTS CONCEPT OF FEEDING PEOPLE WHO ARE HUNGRY, AND WHO ARE IN DJIBOUTI AS THE RESULT OF THE OGADAN WAR, WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RATIONALIZE THE

ATTEMPT TO FEED ONLY 3/5TH OF THE POTENTIAL STUDENT URBAN REFUGEES. WE FIND IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE WHAT EXPLANATION WILL BE GIVEN TO THE ESTIMATED 10,000 TO 15,000 OTHER REFUGEES IN THE CITY OF DJIBOUTI WHO ARE NOT RECEIVING FOOD FROM UNHCR OR OTHERS. WE FURTHER QUESTION THE ADVISABILITY OF ATTEMPTING TO SELECT REFUGEES ON THE BASIS OF A COMMITTEE WHO ARE GIVEN NO STANDARDS OF SELECTION AND WHOSE DECISION AS TO WHO NEEDS FOOD CAN HARDLY BE BASED ON ANYTHING OTHER THAN FRIENDSHIP OR EMOTION.

3. ONE CAN IMAGINE THE STORM OF DISSATISFACTION THAT COULD EXTEND OVER THE DJIBOUTIAN COMMUNITY WHO THEMSELVES ARE UNDERFED AND OFTEN RESENT THE REFUGEES. THE POSSIBILITIES FOR UNREST OR WORSE ARE CERTAINLY PRESENT.
ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS AN EXCELLENT POSSIBILITY THAT NEITHER THE PRIME MINISTER OR THE PRESIDENT HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF THIS MAJOR POLICY CHANGE. (FEEDING REFUGEES IN THE URBAN CENTERS).

4. FOR THESE REASONS WE ASK THAT UNHCR GENEVA DISCUSS POTENTIAL PROBLEM WITH INCOMING ACTING REPRESENTATIVE SCHWAB, AND THAT THIS PROGRAM NOT BE IMPLEMENTED UNTIL MOST OF THE POSSIBLE AREAS OF CONFLICT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DECISION TO SELECT A VERY SMALL GROUP OF REFUGEES (AND NOT EVEN A COMPLETE GROUP

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AT THAT) EXCLUDING THE LARGER PROBLEM OF URBAN REFUGEES OF ANY ILK, IS A PRECEDENT THAT SHOULD BE VERY CAREFULLY EVALUATED. WE ARE QUITE PREPARED TO ACCEPT A DECISION IF IN FACT THOSE MORE EXPERIENCED IN THIS TYPE OF ISSUE CAN AGREE ON A SOLUTION. PLEASE ADVISE VIA US EMBASSY CHANNEL UNHCR AND US MISSION REACTION.

DECONTROL UPON RECEIPT.

CLARKE

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